

214.
The Stroke of Death, practically improved.

THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. SUSANNA BIRLEY,

Late Wife of the Rev. George Birley, of
St. Ives, in Huntingdonshire.

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE, JAN. 19th, 1782,

In the Thirtieth Year of her Age.

PREACHED AT ST. IVES, FEB. 3d.

BY DAN TAYLOR:

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

THE SPEECH

DELIVERED AT HER INTERMENT, JAN. 23d,

BY ROBERT ROBINSON.

LONDON:

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MDCCLXXXII.

363

SUBSTANCE

OF A

S. E. R. M. O. N.

ORIGINATED BY THE STATE OF

MRS. SUSANNA BIRLEY



Late Wife of the late Sir John Birley, Bart.

who departed this life on the 17th day of

the month of January 1884.

Testified at the Court of Probate

BY DAN TAYLOR

Notary Public for England and Wales

THE S. E. R. M. O. N.

DELIVERED AT THE COURT OF PROBATE

BY ROBERT HOBSON

LONDON

Printed and Published by the Author, at the Court of Probate, No. 1, St. Andrew's Place, London, E.C. 4.

A

S P E E C H

DELIVERED AT THE
MEETING-HOUSE,
IN FEN-STANTON,
HUNTINGDONSHIRE,

ON WEDNESDAY, JAN. 23d, 1782,
AT THE INTERMENT OF

Mrs. SUSANNA BIRLEY,

*Aged Twenty-nine Years, late Wife of the
Rev. Mr. Birley, of St. Ives, and also
at that of their only child, aged Ten
Weeks.*

BY ROBERT ROBINSON.

My Brethren,

THE most refined human pleasure in this world is social pleasure, or that, which arises from communion with others, and, of all social pleasures that, which arises from a wise and virtuous conjugal union, is the highest. Delicious, however, as this enjoyment is, there comes a period in life, which

reduces the happiest man to the wretchedness of saying, concerning the lovely object of all his joy, *Bury my dead out of my sight.*

At such sad seasons, at the graves of all we value in this world, we are called to exercise the most noble, but the most difficult of all devotional acts : here we are to treat God as God; to resign to him his own gifts, to acknowledge him as master and Lord of all, to confide in his wisdom and goodness, and cordially to allow, admire and adore the rectitude of his government. May you, my brother, be enabled to exercise this act of devotion now! And may we, who surround you, become soft by sympathy, and yield to such impressions as these gloomy objects are fitted to imprint! *When the last deep sleep falleth upon our families, then God openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.*

How shall we comfort this afflicted family? Or what shall we say to edify you, ye numerous spectators of their grief? For my part, I cannot look at this scene without recollecting a similar case in scripture history

Gen. xxiii. 4. Rev. Mr. Birley. Job xxxiii.
15. 16. Mrs. Birley's family, the Ashtons of St. Ives.

full

full of instruction and consolation. I will beg leave to mention it, because it may instruct us all, and because it may comfort our weeping friends, for it is some relief to mourners to have a partner in woe.

Son of man, said God formerly to the prophet Ezekiel, *behold I take away from thee, the desire of thine eyes with a stroke, yet thou shalt not mourn.* On this case we make the four following reflections,

First, *A social life is consistent with the highest religious attainments.* Ezekiel was an inspired prophet, yet, like his predecessors the patriarchs, and like his successors the apostles, he was a married man. There is, therefore, nothing in domestic life inconsistent with the duties of religion, nothing incompatible with the noblest offices, and the highest enjoyments in the church. Revealed religion is rational and manly, and they, who teach it, are best taught themselves by such a train of events as exercise all their fellow creatures. It is not in a lonely cell, it is not in a legend, either learned or devout, it is by

Ezek. xxiv.

Gen. xxxiii. 5.

our own fire-sides that we are domesticated; it is in a circle of parents, wives and *children whom God graciously gives his servants*; it is in an intercourse with domesticks, a personal concern in affairs of real life, that we feel we are *men of like passions with you*, and there we are driven to the sweet necessity of finding out the doctrines and the duties of a religion to be publicly recommended to your faith and practice. There also we are forced to learn what will cool the passions, animate the spirits, and support the good man under the burdens, which providence dooms him to carry. Hence publick usefulness, hence instructions that come home to the business and bosoms of mankind. The church of Rome has thought fit to reverse all this natural order, by training up her stately church officers in sullen gloomy recesses, by enjoining a single life on all her ministers, by exchanging the man of sentiment and sympathy for that solitary unfeeling thing called a monk. The pretence is chastity; the true reason is secular policy.

Secondly, *Domestick blessings are subject to abuse*. If you think proper to read, when

you go home, the twenty-fourth of Ezekiel, you will observe, that what is called in one verse *the desire of the eyes* is said in another to be that on which men *set their minds*. This is a beautiful and emphatical expression, full of meaning, and too descriptive, alas! of what happens every day to us all. Providence gives us respectable parents, amiable wives, lovely children, and on these we *set our minds*, pitching our hearts on them, as if they were infallible grounds, on which we might erect spacious habitations of felicity; on them we place our hopes, on them we depend for happiness, with them we incorporate too often both our duty to God, and our delight in his empire; in a word, them we not unfrequently eye as our supreme good. Fancy gets loose from reason and religion, and says, This son hath an undaunted courage; I see the gallant youth in future serve my country, and immortalize my name in the navy or the army: That other boy is active and acute; I see him in a future day accumulate riches, and do good to mankind in a busy mercantile line of life: A third is studious and grave; I see, I hear him in the pulpit pleading the cause of truth and virtue, *turning many to*

righteousness, and shining as a star in the christian firmament for ever and ever. This frugal industrious daughter I see in future the soul of a great family, conveying order, plenty and piety through the whole: and that gentle girl, soft and delicate in all her manners, adorn her own sex, polish the other, and render herself the paradise of all that know her: And all this my eyes, and the eyes of their good mother shall behold, and then, in hoary old age, surrounded with childrens children to the third and fourth generation, full of days, riches, and honours, and satiated with life, we will say, Lord now lettest thou thy servants depart in peace. My brethren, what if we should pass by, and see a friend in such a reverie? Should we not pity him for erecting such mighty hopes on a bottom of human frailty? Should we not tremble for his to-morrow? Should we not exclaim, this benevolent but unskilful man hath built his house upon the sand! This is spring-time: but when the fall of the year arrives, when the rains descend, when the floods come, when the winds blow, and beat upon his house, what, if he do not love God

more than all these, if he be not well versed in the character of the supreme governor of the world, what will become of this unhappy man !

Yet all these hopes are natural, all these desires are just, all these prospects are parental, and to a certain line they are rational and religious ; and God sometimes gratifies them all. The evil lies in *so setting our hearts* on the accomplishing of our plans, as to take the liberty of rebelling against God, when he sees fit to blast all our opening prospects. I say when God sees *fit*, for my weeping friends, you must forgive me, if, in executing this office assigned me by her, whose spokesman I have the painful honour to be, I venture to affirm, in spite of the turbulence of our passions, that God does always that, which, all things considered, is most right and fit to be done. To admit this truth will give you a momentary pain, because it will discover, that excessive grief, and discontent with providence proceeds not from reason and religion, but from misguided passions : but you will receive ample amends by the long pleasure, which the dominion of religion will produce.

We

We observe, then, thirdly, that *God is as wise and good in sometimes defeating all our designs as he is at other times in gratifying them.*

A hard lesson : but sooner or later it must be learnt ! God is an uniform being, always consistent with himself. His supreme excellence is love of order, and all his government is a maintenance of it in all parts of his empire. Whether he save life or destroy it, he acts from the same invariable principle. In all cases he is too wise to do any thing wrong, too good to do any thing unkind. This doctrine can never be too much inculcated, and in the case before us it is highly applicable and effective.

To elucidate this let us observe two things. First, our earthly social pleasures are either the *ends*, for which we were created, or they are the *means* of conducting us to some other end more great and noble. Is man, with all his godlike powers, created for the sole purpose of enjoying a conjugal or parental union ? Imperfect enjoyments at the best ! Is he, who is capable of the highest attainments of knowledge and virtue, and of the enjoyment of them for ever and ever ; is he, who is formed for the glorious purpose of knowing,
imitating,

imitating, and enjoying the first great cause in eternal worlds, undisgraced by vicissitude and death; is he sunk to the sad necessity of basking in the sunshine of one short day, and pleasing himself like a beast (for beasts have pleasing sensations) with animal associations! No, all these are means, and God and moral excellence are ends of our existence. Rise man, rise into your dignity. Consider the chain of causes and effects, and reason thus, for to enable thee to reason thus, thy heavenly father committed thee to the tuition of these fable masters: say, if the intelligence, the wisdom, the virtue, of one beloved companion gave me so much pleasure, what should I enjoy if I were intimately *acquainted with God!* If the loss of one such bosom friend give me so much pain, what nameless agony should I feel, were I ever to be so ignorant and wicked as to forfeit the enjoyment of God! Parents, wives, children, what are you all but single drops! God is the fountain, from which you came, God is the source of felicity to which you go, and thither my heart shall follow you,

Let us observe, secondly, that providence

Job xxii. 21.

never

never removes our christian friends till they have finished their work, and then they go to receive their wages. A genuine disciple of Jesus Christ *follows him here in the regeneration, works out his salvation with fear and trembling, serves the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, struggles through much tribulation, and at length arrives at the gate of the kingdom of heaven ; and shall I wish this good soul for my sake to be deprived of his reward, Shall I wish him detained from such a bliss, the object of all his prayers, and tears, and hopes, merely to accommodate me ? Would that be fair ? What ! when I know too, the price he must pay for gratifying my humour ? Shall I doom him to sleepless nights and solitary days ? Shall I require of him to drag about a body of sin and death as I do ? Shall I wish him in a condition to say in the morning, would God it were evening, and in the evening, would God it were morning ? Not I. No, rather let me be just to my own hurt ; let me honour them that fear, and now that they have fought the good fight, let me agree they should go and receive the crown. Let me imitate him, who, though he fasted, and lay upon the*

earth, and wept and prayed, while his child was sick, yet, on receiving the news of his death, arose from the earth, washed and anointed himself, changed his apparel, and went into the house of the Lord, and justified his conduct by saying, now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

This leads me to the last observation on the case of the prophet Ezekiel. *There are works of more importance for the living to do than that of weeping for the dead.* Far be it from us to censure the humane sighs and tears of families afflicted like this. It would argue a worse than brutal insensibility not to feel on this mournful occasion. Sorrow pent up in the heart would soon break it. It has a natural discharge, let it flow and disburden the soul. Weep, afflicted family! and allow us to mingle our tears with yours: but let us all remember, that our business here is to do more than weep, that weeping is a small part, and that to acquire knowledge now on the spot, and when we return home to reduce it to practice, are duties of far more importance than that of bedewing the dust with our tears.

The prophet Ezekiel was commanded not to lament his own trouble : but to attend to the greater troubles of his country and the church of God. Let us imitate this bright example. Let us examine how we may most and best serve society. Let us address ourselves to the discharge of all the duties of life. We owe a duty to God : Let us be submissive and obedient to his will. We owe a duty to our fellow creatures : Let us be just and benevolent : Let us pity the wicked, love the righteous, and do good to all mankind. We owe a duty to ourselves : let us not disable ourselves by grief, but let us hold body and soul sacred, and let both be employed in manly and christian exercises for these bodies are redeemed to rise again, and these souls are to be for ever with the Lord. Our obligations, far from being discharged by our losses, increase as the friends of virtue expire, and we should study to keep society from missing absent benefactors, by performing such kind offices as they would have performed, had they continued to live in a world abounding with objects of beneficence. As these considerations should have weight with us all, so they ought to be most accurately and nicely balanced by those, who sustain publick offices in the church, for this is to embody the doctrine

trine of God our Saviour, and to render christianity visible even to roving eyes.

Hence, then, let us depart, penetrated with two just and seasonable reflections. Let each consider, first, how soon he may be brought into the condition of this distressed man, who survives his chief earthly joy. We are all of us neighbours, many of us intimate friends of this family. Their condition affects us. They lament, and we mourn with them, and our sympathy is a little small relief to their woe: but, were it proper for them to break silence, would they not say to us, *weep also for yourselves*, behold in us the uncertainty of earthly enjoyments, next week perhaps the scene may change, you may suffer as we do, and we like you may stand by and look on? Is there one of you, my fellow christians, in all this assembly, who can stand up and say, Let the whole world die, I have not one object of my esteem, no not one to whom my heart hath a peculiar attachment? If there were one such person, we should doom him to depart from the society of men, he would be too bad for even a brute, he should sink into marble or brass. But you, my brethren, you

Luke, xxiii. 28.

have

have passions, and your passions have objects, and objects so perfect in your eyes that it would be a great misery only to suspect you should be deprived of them. Well ! suspect it not. Hope in God. Enjoy your day. Enjoy to-morrow too. Let fancy, pleasant artist ! Magnify and multiply your sum. Yet, after all, the fatal time must come, and you like us must put on mourning too, and be *left* (cold and comfortless word !) you must *be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain*, a signal to warn, and so to preserve society.

Must such a day come ? I ought then to prepare for it. May to-morrow be the day ? I ought then to prepare immediately, this present moment. But what will prepare me for such an event as this ? This is our last reflection. True religion is the only preparation for affliction. The religion of the afflicted is prudence, patience, submission, content. These virtues were all exemplified in our Lord Jesus Christ, and by his example they are both recommended and enforced. Happy for us, if we exemplify the maxim of the wise man, *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting ;*

for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart!

We never pray at a grave, lest we should mislead our little children, who know not yet their right hands from their left in the way to heaven. We would not ensnare their unwary steps, or tempt them to form one idea favourable to that exploded popish practice, praying for the dead. Let us depart from this dreary receptacle of the dead in peace with God, and with all mankind, and, all animated with social universal love, let each as he retires pray, *that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost may be with us all.*



TO
MY DEAR AND HONOURED FRIENDS,
THE
HUSBAND, PARENTS, BROTHERS, SISTER,
AND
OTHER RELATIONS OF THE DECEASED,
THIS PLAIN DISCOURSE IS,
WITH GREAT RESPECT AND AFFECTION,
DEDICATED, BY
THEIR AFFECTIONATE BROTHER,
AND HUMBLE SERVANT

THE AUTHOR.



T H E

STROKE OF DEATH,

PRACTICALLY IMPROVED, &c.

WE are convened this evening my dear audience, to improve, for the advantage of the several classes of men now present, but especially for the edification of a mourning family, the most solemn event with which this world is acquainted. I need not inform you that I mean the *awful stroke of death*, which, by the direction of infinite wisdom, has lately removed from us a person of a very amiable disposition, and of many valuable accomplishments, which could not fail to render her peculiarly agreeable to those, who were most intimately acquainted with her. I am well persuaded, from my own knowledge of her experience in re-

ligion, from her temper and conduct,—as well as from the testimony of those, who are best qualified to judge in the case, that there is no reason to mourn on *her* account ; as we have evidence that *she* is translated to the regions of life and immortality. But it is incumbent upon us, and will contribute to the promotion of our best interests, while we mingle our sorrows with those of surviving relatives, for the loss of so valuable a member of religious and civil society, to make such reflections on the stroke by which these sorrows are occasioned, as, through the blessing of God, may make *us* more fit, *either to live or to die*. To assist you in making these reflections, is my present design ; and to this I address myself, through divine assistance, from that remarkable passage of scripture which my dear brother, the husband of the deceased, has thought proper to mention as suitable to the present solemnity.

Ezek. xxiv. ver. 16.

Son of man, behold, I take away from thee, the desire of thine eyes with a stroke.—

The providence, brethren, which, at this time, has called me among you, forbids me
to

to employ these few precious moments on any subject which requires critical labour. This would be equally alien from your design, and from the feelings of my heart, while I share so largely, and sympathize so sensibly as I do, with my dear friends, in the sorrows excited by the dispensation of providence that has brought together this very numerous assembly. Nor shall I, for the same reason, *enlarge* on that part of sacred history and prophecy, to which the text relates, however suitable and edifying such enlargement would be on other occasions.

Yet I humbly apprehend I should hardly do justice to the subject, or to my hearers, without stopping one moment to remind you on what occasion the words before us were addressed to the great prophet Ezekiel.

Few, who have arrived at maturity, and have read the sacred scriptures, (which God forbid any of you should neglect!) can have failed to observe, that though the Lord chose the nation of Israel as a peculiar people to himself, yet they were "a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that were corruptors : they forsook the Lord, and
provoked

provoked the HOLY ONE of Israel to anger." This character was most dreadfully applicable to the whole nation of Israel in their long journey through the wilderness, and after their settlement in the promised land, in the time of the judges; and too much so in the times of the kings, till the revolt of the ten tribes, and the division of the nation into two bodies in the reign of Rehoboam. After this, God still regarded the people of *Judah*, as his peculiar people; but they still frequently rebelled against him. He visited them with many chastisements, for their rebellion, and forebore them from age to age, though they were "a disobedient and gainsaying people," before he poured down his fury upon them, in the desolating stroke to which this chapter refers. Among other corrections, he often suffered their enemies to prevail against them. Their capital city Jerusalem was often besieged and plundered; particularly by *Shishack*, king of Egypt; by *Joash*, king of Israel; by *Pharaoh Necho*, another king of Egypt; and by *Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon.

To this last king, and to his successors, the Chaldean, and after the death of *Belshazzar*,

Isai. i. 4. Kings, xiv, 26, 27. Kings, xiv. 2.
1 Kings xxiii. 33,—36.

the

the last of them, the Persian kings, the men of Judah were captive no less than seventy years. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerufalem several times: as in the reign of Jehoiachin, and finally, in the reign of Zedekiah, kings of Judah. To this last, and most effectual attack on the city, the prophecies of the chapter where our text lies, most evidently refer. By the former sieges several eminent men had been carried captive to Babylon, among whom was the prophet *Ezekiel*. To him, however, the Lord yet spoke, and employed him as his prophet to his brethren in captivity; and, notwithstanding the great distance of Chaldea, where *Ezekiel* now was, from the land of Judah, yet the *very same day* that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerufalem, it was revealed to the prophet in the land of the Chaldeans. *Ezekiel* is commanded to "utter a parable" to the rebellious house of Judah, and to represent their miserable situation, and the calamities coming upon them, by the emblem of a *boiling pot*. This parable is illustrated in a most dreadful address to the nation of *Judah* in the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of this

Dan. v. 30. 2 Kings, xxiv. 1, &c. 2 Kings, xxiv.
10, &c. 2 Kings, xxv. 1, &c. V. 1, 2. Compare 2
Kings, xxi. 1, &c.

chapter.

chapter. "In thy filthiness is lewdness, because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it; it shall come to pass, and I will do it. I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent. According to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God."

The same subject is resumed in the verse before the text. And in the text itself, the certainty, the weight, and perhaps, the suddenness of this calamitous stroke of divine vengeance on the city and temple of Jerusalem, are strongly represented to the prophet, by *the death of his wife*, which is here foretold.—"Behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke."—The prophet Ezekiel was an eminent man of God, and very probably his wife was a holy woman. As such, they were agreeable companions, happy in their God, and in each other. The stroke threatened would therefore be peculiarly painful and afflicting, and consequently would more suitably represent the distress now falling on the people of Judah. An agreeable and gracious wife, "a woman that feareth
the

the Lord" is the chief earthly comfort of any man who knows the spirit and deserves the name of a husband. So the city and temple of Jerufalem, and the advantages and privileges enjoyed in them, were the chief and most valuable, and of consequence the most desirable treasure of that nation.—The loss of such a companion as this is certainly the most distressing calamity that can, in the common course of things, attend an affectionate and tender husband. So no calamity could be more painful and distressing to the Jews, whether considered in a religious or political view, than the ravaging of the temple and depopulation of their city. To this the mourning prophet, Jeremiah, seems to have an eye; and his expressions, in this application of them, have a sensibility and an energy, perhaps, seldom exceeded. "Is it nothing to
 "you, all ye that pass by? behold and see if
 "there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,
 "which is done unto me, wherewith the
 "Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his
 "fierce anger."

On the text, thus generally illustrated, let us proceed to make a few remarks, farther

to discover the force of it, and it's suitability to the present occasion.—Let us then make a few observations on the stroke of death, as it respects mankind in general, and believers in particular ;—and let us thirdly enquire what practical instructions we can derive from the whole.

I. We make a few remarks on the words, for the farther discovery of their force, and their suitability to the present occasion.

1. The conjugal relation is a very tender and sensible one. It is natural, it is right, it is commendable in a gracious husband to consider and regard his wife as the “desire of his eyes;” as the most valuable of earthly objects. Ezekiel thus considered his, and it does not seem to be at all a matter of blame in him. The occasion of the words, and the history to which they refer require this remark. If the husband and wife are united together from rational, christian principles, this cordial esteem and affection take place at first. And if they mutually exercise the temper, which their relation demands, their affection and esteem will continue, as it ought to do, to the end of life ; till death separate them. This appears a wise appointment of divine providence,

dence, in order that each may contribute, with cheerfulness and pleasure, the assistance wanted under all the fatigues and troubles incident to every condition of life here below.

—Their conscientious performance of relative duties to each other confirms their union of heart, and increases their mutual regard and affection still the more.—And the Lord enjoins it as their indispensable duty to maintain and cultivate this affectionate esteem towards one another; and especially, that the husband both maintain and manifest it towards his wife. “She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.”

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

“So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself.” From these and many other parts of the divine word, it is apparent that no relation is equal to the conjugal, nor any affectionate regards, which are merely natural, equal to those, which ought ever to subsist between husband and wife. Yet near and dear to each other as these bosom companions are, and ought to be, we are taught by the words

Gen. ii. 23, 25.

Ephes. xxxi, 28.

before

before us, and many other passages, as well as by constant observation,

2. That the stroke of death, will assuredly part them. It is our wisdom to lay this into the account at first, and to keep it in view ever afterwards. Whatever situation we are placed in, however prosperous our circumstances, however successful our pursuits, however harmonious and agreeable our tempers and dispositions, however weighty and numerous our cares, however advantageous our mutual counsels and assistances, and however reluctant we may be to a separation, this stroke will come, and, in spite of all our efforts to evade or resist, it will break in pieces this tenderest of all connections known on earth. Death is interwoven in every constitution, and flows in every drop of our blood. "It is appointed unto men once to die." And yet, certain and inevitable as this stroke is, the connection and design of my text require me to add,

3. That such a stroke is peculiarly painful and calamitous to the surviving husband. It tears from his eyes, from his arms, from his

Heb. ix. 27.

bosom,

bosom, the dear partner of his cares, his joys, and his sorrows.—It closes for ever those dear eyes which have always been observant of what might contribute to his welfare.—It gives a fatal dash to those capacities, which have been united and exerted, in a manner and to a degree scarcely possible in any other, to alleviate her partner's distresses, and advance his joys, as if those joys and distresses of her husband had been her own.—It disconcerts their most pleasing schemes, though formed with the most perfect harmony of which mortals are capable and though pursued with the most glowing ardour. On these accounts, the affectionate, but now disconsolate husband is almost ready to cry, “It is better for me to die than to live.” But I check myself. These are subjects too delicate and too pungent to admit of enlargement at this time, lest I open afresh the wounds of my dear brother's heart, which have undoubtedly bled profusely enough already, and whose mournful situation I sensibly commiserate. Rather, I proceed to the

4. And last remark to which the passage calls our attention, namely, that it ought

Jon. iv. 8.

to

to silence all our murmurings, and excite a holy, humble resignation, to hear our merciful God and father say, *the stroke is from me.* "I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." What the great sovereign of the universe does is always right. Let my dear brother, and let my honoured weeping friends hear him say, "Be still, and know that I am God." Far be it from me, it would be unkind, it would be unjust, to *hide* your sorrows. I only mean to advise *moderation* in them, I only wish them to be rational, and christian sorrows; the sorrows of those, who consider that it is *the Lord's doing*, and that "he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him." This, I doubt not, you *have* considered already, and have united with an ancient saint in the midst of calamities quite unequalled, in saying "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." And I wish such considerations as the following may compose your spirits, and confirm you in this holy dutiful resignation still more abundantly.

Our heavenly father has a sovereign right to dispose of us and of all we have as he himself pleases. We are entirely his; and

Psal. xlv. 10.

Eccl. viii. 3.

Job, i. 21.

all

all our blessings, and enjoyments come from him. And “ is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own ?” If, by his munificence, we have enjoyed the great favour of an intimate friend, or an amiable relative for months or years past, is that any reason why the same favour should be still continued to us ? Or, have we any demands upon the Lord Almighty to continue his blessings so long as we please ?——He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. He never does, or can do wrong. “ Shall not the judge of all the earth do right” ought, on all occasions, to quiet our minds, and, under every afflicting dispensation of providence, to forbid repining and impatience. Let us often reflect upon it, and frequently remind one another that the Lord is “ a God of truth, and without iniquity ; just and right is he.”—Nor can he possibly be mistaken ; for he is perfect in knowledge and in wisdom. He is “ the only wise God ; and “ his understanding is infinite.” He could not be at a loss to determine what was best for the dear deceased ; He could not fail to see what is best for surviving relatives.—And he is a God of love and mercy. “ He is good to all, and his tender mercies

Mat. xx. 15.
1 Tim. i. 17.

Gen. xviii. 15.
Psal. cxlvii. 5.

Deut. xxxii. 4.

C

are

are over all his works." But he is especially kind and compassionate to his saints. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He will load them with no unnecessary or intolerable burdens. "He will not suffer them to be tempted, or *tried*, above what they are able to bear; and with every trial he will make a way to escape." He will most certainly make "all things work together for their good." And whatever may appear unsearchable, or mysterious in the conduct of providence now, shall certainly, if needful, be hereafter unfolded and made plain; and the wisdom and propriety of it fully demonstrated. What he does, and why he does it, we are frequently ignorant now; but so far as it will contribute to our happiness, or be necessary to justify his proceedings, "we shall know hereafter." It will probably constitute one part of the happiness of saints in heaven to review and admire the dispensations of a wise and gracious God towards them while upon earth. These considerations, my friends, are richly sufficient to reconcile our minds to every stroke with which the blessed God may see it proper to visit us here below. Nothing can

Psal. cxlv. 9. Psal. ciii. 13. 1 Cor. x. 13. Rom.
viii. 28. John xiii. 17.

be

be wrong, if performed by such a hand; nothing erroneous that proceeds from infinite wisdom, nor any thing unkind that flows from a heart so full of compassion and love. We proceed,

II. To make a few observations on the stroke of death, as it respects mankind in general, and believers in particular. These observations indeed, are *common* and *obvious*; but they are so important in themselves, and, I fear, so little practically regarded, that I cannot persuade myself to omit them. And I earnestly beseech my dear audience to lay them to heart.

1. Respecting mankind in general.

The stroke of death separates the soul and body from each other, and lays the latter in the dust. That man is composed of soul and body, our daily sensations manifest, and the word of God demonstrates. "Fear not them," says our blessed Saviour, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."

Mat. x. 28.

These two constituent parts of man are united in a manner not to be explained by mortals ; but the proof of this union is indisputable. Death does not destroy our existence, but dissolve this union. It shatters and breaks down that beautiful part of divine workmanship, the body, which so remarkably displays the wisdom and power of its great creator, as a decayed tabernacle, or tent, in which the soul has had its agreeable abode : and so “ the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” Thus these two harmonious companions are rent asunder till that awful and tremendous morning, when “ all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth ; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.”

This stroke is the consequence of sin. For “ sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Had mankind never

2 Cor. v. 1.
Rom. v. 12.

Eccl. xii. 7.

John, v. 28, 29.

revolted

revolted from God, by the transgression of his righteous commands, we had never been exposed to this awful stroke. For "the language of the divine law is, "the man that doeth these things shall live in them." But now alas ! it is otherwise. The law is broken, sin is committed ; and disorders and death are the consequences, to all the fallen sons of Adam.

It is a stroke that makes no distinctions among men. Are we possessed of great *earthly treasures* ? Alas ! these "profit not in the day of wrath," nor can they shield the owners of them from this fatal blow. "The rich man died and was buried," as well as the poor man, who had "laid at his gate full of sores." *Grandeur, power, and dignity* have, in this case, no respect paid them. Death knows no difference between the crowned head, and the meanest peasant. When the commission is given, the fatal shaft is lodged in the vitals, and the most dignified mortal falls and rises no more.—There is no partiality here in favour of *beauty*. The most blooming cheek ; the loveliest features have no power to resist,

any more than the withered and deformed.—Nay, even *learning* itself, the finest, the noblest, and incomparably the most valuable of all mere natural accomplishments, must yield to this mighty conqueror. For the grave is “the house appointed for *all-living*,”—Once more *age*, or *youth* obtains no favour, nor can possibly defend any one from the stroke of death. The old and the young, the infant of a day, and the man of grey hairs are alike exposed to it. We have a striking proof of this in the solemn providence which calls us together this evening. The amiable mother, and her infant, a few weeks old, are both, in the same coffin, conveyed to the same grave, and sleep in the dust together. And you, my young friends in this assembly, have you not frequently seen those who were young as any of you, consigned to the tomb? Let the thought have place in your minds; let it be impressed on your hearts; let it engage your earnest, your immediate attention. And let me intreat you to prepare to follow them: for who can tell

Job. xxx. 23.

Mrs. Birley, and her infant, aged ten weeks, died near together, and are interred in the same coffin.

but

but the same messenger may soon receive commission to arrest you ?

Farther ; the stroke of death removes those on whom it falls, from all the pleasures and enjoyments of time. Alas ! how many are there, who, unhappy for them ! are “ lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God.” May I be permitted to enquire whether any of that inconsiderate tribe are present here to-night ? Allow me to remind you how soon you will be convinced by arguments of irresistible force that your laughter, and miscalled pleasure is “ like the crackling of thorns under a pot.” It will all end in darkness, smoke, confusion, and death. Perhaps the messenger is at your very doors ; and then your pleasure is turned into eternal pains, and your laughter and mirth into “ weeping and gnashing of teeth,” for ever.

Again ; by this stroke we are deprived of all opportunities to prepare for heaven. “ There is no work, or device, or wisdom, or knowledge, in the grave whether we are all going.” The *present* is the only time for

2 Tim. iii. 4.

Eccl. vii. 6.

Eccl. ix. 10.

sure work with respect to *hereafter*. You can *now* read the book of God which is “able to make you wise to salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” *Now* you can hear that word, which, if *received*, and practically regarded “is able to save your souls.” You are *now* most graciously invited to that Saviour who declares, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” But the time is drawing nigh, when, if you now slight the overtures of mercy, and “reject the counsel of God against yourselves,” you will most certainly find that “he who made you will have no mercy on you, and he that formed you will shew you no favour.” Then, my unhappy fellow-creatures, you will prove to your unremitted and everlasting sorrow, that only “*now* is the accepted time,” *now* alone is the day of salvation.”

Once more, the stroke of death is a *certain* stroke, that calls us to the judgment seat of Christ; in consequence of which, our eternal state is irrevocably determined. “It is appointed to men once to die, and after that the judgment.” And when the judgment is past,

2 Tim. iii. 15. James i. 21. John vi. 37. Isai.
xxvii. 11. 2 Cor. vi. 2. Heb. ix. 27.

all

all go to their own place, "the wicked into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." The great day when "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," may indeed, be at some distance, and undoubtedly is so. But as "there is no work in the grave," we shall certainly be found at the judgment day, in the same state in which we depart this life. If death meet us filthy or unjust, we remain so still: or, if righteous and holy, we continue righteous and holy still. If, (to adopt the wise man's expression) "the tree falleth towards the south, or towards the north; in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall lie." If we die in our sins, we die condemned, and remain under condemnation through never ending ages.

And let none of my dear hearers forget that the *time* of this stroke is very *uncertain*. God only knows when it will fall on me, or on any of you. It may be very soon; it may be this night. It is sometimes very sudden; and it may be so to any of us. Happy, happy the man who is always prepared for it. "There-

Mat. xxv. 46.

Rom. ii. 16.

Eccl. xi. 3.

fore,

fore, be ye also ready, for at an hour when ye think not," it may come upon you.

2. Let us consider this stroke as it respects the true believer in particular. I humbly hope, among my present auditors, there are many of this happy number : many who have " passed from death unto life." I trust many of you are deeply convinced of your sinful and miserable state in the sight of God ; and that you have repented of all your sins : that you are thoroughly sensible that salvation is " not of works, lest any man should boast." have understood and believed that the blessed Jesus " bare your sins in his own body on the tree ;" and have by faith in him, " fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you," in the gospel of the grace of God ; the good news of salvation provided for lost sinners through the precious blood of the everlasting covenant, and commanded by it's ever glorious and adorable author to be " proclaimed to every creature." You understand, and prove, by happy experience the truth and

John iii. 14.
Heb. vi. 18.

Ephes. ii. 8, 9.
Mark xvi. 15.

1 Pet. ii. 24.

import

import' of the apostle's declaration, when he tells us that " the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." You have hereby " received the forgiveness of sins." You have also received the spirit of God, " which is given to them that believe." And hereby " the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts." You " love God and keep his commandments." Those who experimentally know these things are true believers. They are real christians. These happy persons must die. And it is a comfortable and reviving thought that they must. They would not live here always. A world of glory awaits them. They may therefore well desire, with submission to their heavenly father's will, " to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." For,

The stroke of death translates them from a world of darkness, ignorance, and confusion, to a world of light. They do indeed, here, enjoy some degree of spiritual knowledge and understanding. For, " God, who command-

Rom. i. 16.
Rom. v. 5.

Acts x. 43.
1 John v. 2.

John vii. 38, 39.
Phil. i. 23.

ed

ed the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." But how little do even these know in the present state ! how dark their conceptions ! how contracted their views ! and how much confusion is frequently mingled with the light they have ! even the eminent apostle Paul himself confesses, " Now we see through a glass darkly ;—now I know in part." —But, blessed be the name of the Lord ! he could subjoin, and every true believer may adopt his words, " Then I shall see face to face. Then I shall know even as also, I am known." Hence the inheritance to be enjoyed in heaven, is called " the inheritance of the saints in light."

By the stroke of death the saints are removed from a world of perplexing controversy and contention, to a world of harmony and peace. Here are animosities and contentions on every side, and almost on every subject. Religious contentions, civil contentions, political contentions are frequently tearing communities in pieces, and almost distracting the inhabitants of our globe. But in heaven

2 Cor. iv. 6.

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Col. i. 12.

all

all are peaceful and harmonious. Those who are admitted there "enter into peace." They unite, without one jarring note, in the most harmonious anthems of praise, and ascriptions of "blessing and honour, and glory, and power, to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb for ever and ever."

This world is continually a state of *temptations* and *defilements*; but the true believer is, at death, delivered from it, and translated to a state of *purity* and *holiness*. There is scarcely any situation below the skies, in which it is not difficult to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world." So numerous are the snares and temptations surrounding us here, and so many are the corruptions within us, while "the law in our members wars against the law of our minds," that blessed indeed is he "who watcheth, and keepeth his garments," and "keepeth himself in the love of God." The devil is the christian's sworn and inveterate *adversary*, and indefatigable in his labours to ruin him. He exerts every effort, both of policy and power, to betray and se-

Isai. lvii. 2. Rev. v. 13. James i. 27. 1 Rom.
vii. 23. Rev. xvi. 15. Jud. 21.

duce

duce him. "As a roaring lion he walks about, seeking whom he may devour." On all these accounts, temptations and pollutions continually surround us; and we are exposed to them on the right hand, and on the left. But blessed be our heavenly father, in the happy world to which we are hastening; there will be no pollutions, nor cause to fear any. For nothing that "defileth or worketh abomination," shall enter the heavenly Jerusalem. Sinners of every class, who are not washed in the blood, and renewed by the spirit of Christ, shall be excluded that blissful world. Nor shall Satan ever be permitted to "sift as wheat," or to molest with his fiery darts, the saints in glory, to eternity. Their corruptions shall be completely and everlastingly destroyed in their whole frame. In the separate state, *before* the resurrection, their "spirits are made perfect:" and at the resurrection, Jesus "shall change their vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." And O, what a cheerful prospect is this! to be freed

1 Pet. v. 8, 9.
Phil. iii. 21.

Rev. xxi. 27.

Heb. xii. 23.

from

from pollution, and from all danger of it, both in soul and body ! brethren, “ it doth not yet appear *fully and completely*, what we shall be ; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is.”

Again; the stroke of death delivers the faints from a state of fear and anxiety, and removes them to a world where these shall be known no more. In a world so full of disasters and deaths, as this is, painful anxiety often fills the heart, and fears are excited by many surrounding objects. Our families, our possessions are seldom safe ; and our bodies are continually exposed to disorders and pains. A thousand casual events, as *we* call them, may dash in pieces, all our projects, however prudently formed, and at once deprive us of all sublunary comforts. The very elements are frequently the engines of our misery in this life. But in the blessed regions to which we are hasting as fast as the wings of time can bear us forwards, these disasters will never be known, and consequently never feared; for in those regions, “ there shall be no more death, neither, for-

row nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away."

In the present state the children of God are frequently beheld with scorn and contempt by vain unthinking men of the world, as their saviour also was in the days of his flesh, and as his most eminent followers and servants have been in all ages. But the stroke of death takes them away from the scorn and derision of men, and they are translated to a world where they shall be advanced to real honour and dignity. For when, through Almighty grace, they have "fought the good fight," and have obtained a conquest over their spiritual enemies, they shall sit down with their glorified redeemer on his throne, "even as he overcame, and is set down on the throne of his father," they are made kings and priests unto God and the Father," and they shall reign with him for ever and ever." They shall assuredly experience the fulfilment of that gracious promise which has cheered the hearts of many, and will, I hope, on a repetition of it, cheer many of your hearts, in your own behalf, and in behalf of

Rev. xxi. 4.

Rev. iii. 21.

Rev. i. 6. xxii. 5.

our

our dear deceased sister. " They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

This is a state of toil and labour. But when the stroke comes of which we are now speaking, the saints shall be called to eternal rest. Here they are obliged to attend to the labours necessary for the support of life, and frequently " in the sweat of their face to eat bread," as well as others. They as well as the rest of mankind, pass through many toilsome, painful days, and almost sleepless nights, amidst a great variety of cares and disappointments incident to this state of sin and mortality. And very frequently satan and his unhappy vassals are exerting all their power to make the labours of the christians as arduous and difficult as they can. The saints are, besides this, labouring and struggling against their own fleshly lusts, and the risings of corruption within them, " denying themselves, bearing their cross," and " through the spirit, mortifying the deeds of the body." But adored be the Saviour's name ! " there remaineth a rest to the people of God." Those who here " live

Mat. iii. 17. Gen. iii. 19. Rom. viii. 13. Heb. iv. 9.

D

by

by the faith of the son of God," at last, " die in the Lord," and " rest from their labours," in a state of perfect pleasure and tranquility; unmolested by satan, or any of his agents, in the immediate presence of God, and fruition of him, through never-ending ages.

While the saints are "at home in the body, they are absent from the Lord; and consequently deprived of much felicity which is reserved for them; for "in his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore." And when they are delivered from this corrupt and degenerate world, this joy, and these pleasures shall be theirs. For when the earthly house of their present tabernacle is dissolved by the stroke of death, they shall be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. They shall no longer be imprisoned in flesh and blood; but shall eternally bask in the beams of perfect love, light and liberty. "There shall be no night there, and they shall need no candle, neither the light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." Nothing shall henceforth interpose between them and the glorious object of

Psal. xvi. ii.

2 Cor. v. 1. 8.

Rev. xxii. 5.

their

their ultimate desires and wishes; for "God himself shall be with them, and shall be their God."

In a word, whatever is perplexing or calamitous, whatever tends to carnalize the mind, or afflict the spirit of a real christian, shall be all eternally removed from him at the hour of death. He shall then be disburthened of every encumbrance; every fetter shall be broken from his soul, and all gloom and darkness dispelled from his understanding, and he is placed out of the reach of the cares and labours, the follies and imperfections which belong to this mortal state. His happy spirit dwells with his God and Saviour, while his body is deposited in the dust, to sleep there, till the great rising day, when the archangel's trumpet shall sound, and the graves shall be opened, and "the dead shall be raised incorruptible." Then shall the body also be delivered from "the bondage of corruption," and the whole man shall be introduced "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

Inexpressibly happy situation! delightful prospect indeed! how perfectly mean are all

Rev. xxi. 3.

1 Cor. xv. 52.

Rom. 8. 21.

the gilded toys ; how contemptible is all the gaudy pageantry of this world, compared with the “ exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” reserved in heaven for the followers of the lamb. Who amongst us would not wish to “ die the death of the righteous.” Who is there in this assembly, who is become “ a child of God by faith,” and is not wishing “ to depart, and to be with Christ.” Let us praise our God, brethren, for his great love manifested to us unworthy sinners ! let us congratulate each other on this animating prospect of a blessed immortality ! and let us unite in sentiments of gratitude in behalf of our dear departed sister, who is so safely dismissed from flesh and blood, and is gone before to take her seat at the right hand of her father, and our father ; of her God and our God : and who will soon meet us, and give us a most cordial welcome into the realms of unmixed, uninterrupted, and never-ending felicity.

III. It is time, however, that we proceed to improve the subject, by enquiring what practical instructions are deducible from what hath been said.

2 Cor. iv. 17.

Num. xxxiii. 13.

Gal. iii. 26.

I. Hence

i. Hence we learn what is the one thing needful, and the folly and danger of neglecting it. What is this one thing? what is it that will be durable and permanent, and will make us happy when this short life is at an end? when earthly enjoyments leave us, what will support and comfort you amidst the trying scenes of time? amidst national distresses? family distresses? personal distresses? when your dearest relatives, and best earthly comforts are taken from you? what will fortify you against the approach of adversity? against the fears of death? what will best qualify you to stand with confidence at the bar of God, your maker and your judge? what will give you complete satisfaction when this world is on flames? and through everlasting ages in the next? this, wherever it can be found, is the one thing needful. But where shall we find it? in the palaces of kings? in the dignity of crowned heads? in balls or assemblies? in the pursuit of vain pleasures? or among the poor animal gratifications, which engross the lower herds of mankind? will gaiety and dress furnish us with this richest of jewels? will mere *notions* of truth, or mere *forms* of religion produce, or procure it? or can it be obtained by a round of outward

duties? no, my honoured audience, you certainly know better. Bring these—any of them—all of them to the *test*. Place yourselves in any of the circumstances above-mentioned, and let common sense, let conscience, above all, let the word of God determine what these will do for you in a time of solemn trial. Nothing will answer every purpose in life, death, and eternity, but the knowledge and enjoyment of Jesus Christ, and salvation by him. What says our Saviour himself; our all-wise compassionate Saviour? “This,” he says, “is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Let the great apostle Paul express his view of the matter. Doubtless, says this eminent saint, “I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” This, this, first, is the one thing needful! possessest of this, you need not fear the troubles of life, or the horrors of

John xvii. 3.

Phil. iii. 8, 9.

death.

death. And can any folly be *equal*, can any be *comparable*, to the folly of neglecting this? by this neglect, whatever engage your attention, you throw away the richest pearls for the meanest pebbles, you barter heaven for a contemptible trifle, you lose the glories of eternity, for the worthless gratifications of a moment.

2. Let me assist your enquiries respecting the *way to enjoy* this great blessing, and so to be prepared for the stroke of death. And let me call your most serious attention to it: for if, in this awful affair, “you be wise, you are wise for yourselves; but if you scorn, you alone shall bear it.” All the dreadful consequences of such scorning, in time and eternity, will fall upon your own heads.

In order to illustrate this important concern, let me ask, what have we done? we have “all sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” What is the consequence of sin? death. “The wages of sin is death.” We are exposed to the curse of the Lord Almighty. “Curst is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” We have

Prov. ix. 12. Rom. iii. 12. Rom. vi. 23. Gal. iii. 10.

none of us done this. We have all come short. *Every mouth* is therefore “stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.” What are our best performances by nature? “All our righteousnesses” by nature, are so far from being perfect in the sight of a holy God, so far from being commensurate with the demands of the perfect law, that they are all “as filthy rags.” It would, hence, be natural to infer, if it were not asserted by inspiration, as it is, that salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast.” This subject is most essentially necessary for every one to be acquainted with, both doctrinally and practically. But our little time, at present, will not admit of enlargement. Allow me, therefore, for the sake of brevity, to recite one passage where the way of a sinner’s acceptance with God, and consequently, the foundation of his preparation for death, is given us at large. “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood.” Here we have the *free grace* of God, the fountain of all human happiness, flowing to

Rom. iii. 19.
Rom. iii. 25, 26.

Isai. lxiv. 6.

Ephes. ii. 8, 9.

lost

lost sinners in the gift of his dear son. We have the special capacity in which Jesus is set forth, both in the ministry of the word, and in the eternal counsel of God; as a *propitiation* for the sins of a ruined world: and the one certain, infallible way of obtaining the precious blessing of justification by him: "through faith in his blood." For "by him, all that believe are justified from all things." Only let it be observed that if your faith be real and genuine, it is "a faith that worketh by love." "The record that God hath given of his son" in the everlasting gospel, when cordially received, and the power, and sweetness of it experienced, produces sincere love to him who hath so amazingly loved us: and from this love will arise unreserved, universal obedience to the directions of his word.

Is there then a poor sinner present, who sincerely enquires, "what must I do to be saved?" The divine answer is, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Are any of you employed, this evening, in the

It is generally apprehended that the word *possibly* admits of both the senses given above. See the critics in Poole's Synopsis, and later commentators. Acts xiii. 39. Gal. v. 6. 1 John v. 12. 1 John iv. 19. Acts xvi. 30, 31.

necessary

necessary work of self-examination, respecting the safety of your state, and your preparedness for death? Enquire; “do you believe on the son of God?” In consequence of this, is the love of God shed abroad in your hearts, by the Holy Ghost, given unto you? does this appear by an uniform regard to all his commandments? do you conscientiously make it your business to shew yourselves the real friends of Christ, by doing whatsoever he commands you?” if so; thus living and dying, you shall, at last, experience the blessedness of those that “die in the Lord.” You shall “rest from your labours and your works will follow you.”

I do in the name and presence of God the judge of all, intreat and charge you, my friends, by all the solemn considerations deducible from the *certainty* of death; from the *shortness* and *uncertainty* of life; from the *miseries* of the unregenerate, *at*, and *after* death, and from the inconceivable, everlasting happiness of those who die in the Lord, that you make this great affair you serious immediate business, and that you rest not till you have good scriptural authority to assure your-

John ix. 35.
xiv. 13.

Rom. v. 5.

John xv. 14

Rev.

selves

selves that you are ready "to depart and to be with Christ."

3. From this view of death, and its solemn consequences, I call you to praise a merciful God, who has given his dear son to deliver us from the *fear* of it, and recommend the blessed Jesus to you all, as your only, all-sufficient support and deliverer in your last trying moments. Thus saith the inspired apostle. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part of the same; that through death, he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them, who through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage." By a steady confidence in this glorious deliverer, the real christian can meet death with holy triumph. "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?" What thanks are due to him who thus enables us to defy the "king of terrors," our most certain, determined, cruel, last enemy! I congratulate you, christian brethren, on your enjoyment of this "consolation and good hope through grace." And I pray God we may never forget to ascribe all the glory to him, to whom it is eternally due!

Heb. ii. 14, 15.

1 Cor. xv. 55.

And

And let me not omit to add, that, through infinite mercy, salvation is still exhibited through the same Saviour, even to those who have hitherto neglected it, and, in consequence of that neglect, are unprepared for the stroke of death, and filled with dread at the prospect of it. Poor miserable men ! your case is, indeed, truly lamentable ! not sure of one day in this world, and yet no evidence that you shall be happy in the next ! nay, rather the fullest evidence, from the word of God himself, that dying as you are, you will be eternally tormented. For God himself assures you that “ unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And this change has not taken place in you. Alas ! you are yet in your sins. And for what you know, the stroke of death may meet you this very night ; and then you are consigned to blackness and darkness for ever ? however, blessed be God, your case is not yet absolutely desperate. I stand here in his name to assure you, that “ now is the accepted time.” Jesus died for you on the cross, and is now proclaimed to you in the word of truth. “ As

many as receive him, he gives them power, that is, power of *right*, or *privilege*, to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Attend, my poor fellow sinners! attend to these good tidings *now*, that you may live and rejoice with God and the lamb, when the earth, and all the works that are in it, shall be burnt up. Fly to the compassionate arms of the good God, who "delighteth in mercy," who "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:" who "waits that he may be gracious unto you;" and you shall find that, after all your ungrateful abuse of his goodness, after all your *neglect* of his *great salvation*, he will blot out your transgressions, and "pour out his spirit upon you." He will prepare you for his kingdom and glory; and will soon take you to himself, and you shall sing his praises, and behold his glory world without end.

4. Let the present weighty subject, and the providence which has this evening called us together, remind us of the *pitiabie* state of those who are practically preferring any thing

Εξουσιαν, significat proprie jus, potestatem & autoritatem.
GERHARD. John i. 12. Mic. vii. 18. 2 Pet. iii. 9.
Isai. xxx. 18. Prov. i. 23.

else

else to an immediate *preparation for death*.
 Are there any such poor deluded creatures
 now present? any who are taking delight in
 your *cups*? any who are debasing yourselves
 to a level with beasts, by *unclean lusts*? or
 living in any other kind of open profaneness?
 Alas! sirs, have you not heard? have you not
 read, that "the wicked shall be turned into
 hell? do you not know by whose authority it
 stands upon record, that "neither fornicators
 nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate,
 nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor
 thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revil-
 ers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom
 of God." How can you then, continuing in these
 sins, how can ye escape the damnation of hell.
 Do you imagine that the Almighty arm of
 God is not able to consign you to it? or can
 you suppose these are only words of course?
 are they not the words of God? is he not
 "a God that cannot lie?" if he be, how
 dare you contend with him? how dare you
 "run upon the thick bosses of his bucklers?"
 is hell a mere trifle? is divine vengeance easy
 to bear? or shall you take pleasure in wailing
 and gnashing of teeth, without help, without

Psal. ix. 17.

1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

Matt. xxiii. 33.

relief,

relief, without hope, eternally? If not, make an immediate stand. There are but at most a few steps between you and everlasting death. O take not one step more in sin, lest the next step in sin be the last step in life, and plunge you into a flaming eternity. We pity you, poor sinners! We mourn for your extreme madness. We pray God that this may be the happy moment in which you may come to yourselves, and fly back from that horrid dungeon to which you are so near, —fly back to him who in tender pity to your souls, cries, “turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?” Let us also pity the folly of those who are eagerly pursuing the riches, the honours, or pleasures of this world to the neglect of an immortal crown! Let us bless God, my dear christian brethren, who has graciously taught us the vanity of these despicable trifles, while we mourn the stupidity of those who are yet intent upon them; and thereby manifest that they are “in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity.” Yea, what reason have we to lament the unhappiness of those who are even labouring to furnish themselves with ac-

Ezek. xxiii. 11. Acts viii. 23.

quisitions

quisitions in science while they neglect the knowledge of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Learning is, indeed, the chief of all mere human accomplishments. But it is a melancholy truth, that a person may be educated at the feet of *Gamaliel*, as *Paul* was, and yet, like him, be so ignorant of Christ, as to be “ a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious” to others. He may possess the qualifications, and be exalted to the dignity of a senator, like *Nicodemus*, and yet, on the first, and most weighty subject of practical godliness, may expose his ignorance by asking “ how can a man be born again when he is old ? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born ?” Thereby fully demonstrating that whatever he has acquired of *human* science, he is a stranger to “ the things of the Spirit of God: ”—and, with regard to his best interests, he is in “ darkness and the shadow of death.” Mournful situation ! pitiable case indeed ! “ O that they were wise, that they understood this ! that they would consider their latter end !”

5. Let all true believers, from hence, lift up an eye of faith, and take a pleasing view

John iii. 4. Deut. xxxii. 29. 2 Pet. iii. 10.

of

of that blessed world where the *stroke of death* shall be known no more. This world, brethren, will soon be on flames. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up." Then an end will be put to all your labours, sins, and sorrows. Ravages in families will be known no more. The pleasing connections and sweet friendship of that world will never be broken. For, "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And *now*, "death itself shall be swallowed up in victory." On this meditate daily. Rejoice in this, under all the troubles and distresses that belong to the present state. Remind yourselves, and remind one another that your ever faithful Saviour is ascended into heaven, "to prepare a place for you," and has promised you that "he will come again, and take you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also."

6. As real christians, as well as others, will soon be called out of the world by death, let me advise all such to be diligent in improving the present moments for God. Your time is

2 Pet. iii. 10. 1 Cor. xv. 26, 54. John xiv. 3.

E

short

short, brethren, exert yourselves and make much of it. Beware of sloth and trifling in your Saviour's work. "Whatsoever your hands find to do, do it with your might." Consider what christianity demands of you, in your several departments; and be faithful and vigorous in answering these demands. Employ all the members of your bodies, exert all the capacities of your mind, and all the superfluities of your earthly possessions, to support and advance your redeemer's interest. Adorn it by a holy conversation; and recommend it to others, by every prudent method. Remember him, who left heaven, and gave his life for you. "Ye are not your own," brethren, "ye are bought with a price," a price of no less value than the blood of God's dear son. You are, therefore, under every possible obligation to "glorify God with your bodies and with your spirits which are his." And your adorable Saviour, in his superabounding goodness, to encourage your diligence, fidelity, and zeal, has frequently and most positively assured you, that your labours for him (poor, as you are, always ready to acknowledge them) "shall in no wise lose their reward!" And

Eccl. ix. 10.

1 Cor. vi. 20.

"therefore

“ therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ; forasmuch as ye know that your labours are not in vain in the Lord.”

7. As this stroke will assuredly, in a little time, rend from the embraces of each other, those who are so nearly and tenderly related as man and wife, let me entreat all here in that relation, to act as in continual expectation of it.

You, are “ the desire of each other’s eyes,” Labour, while life is spared, to make each other as happy as you can. Take every proper and christian method to *manifest* and *promote* that pure cordial affection which always ought to subsist between you. Be conscientious in the mutual discharge of your respective duties. “ Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” See that ye “ dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life ; that your prayers be not hindered. “ And ye wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.”

1 Cor. xv. 58. Col. iii. 19. 1 Pet. iii. 7. Col. iii. 18.

1. It is your duty, and it will your honour, and happiness to “ be in subjection to your own husbands ; that if any husband obey not the word, they may, without the word, be won by conversation of the wives.” In a word ; “ let every husband love his wife, even as himself ; and let the wife see that she reverence her husband.” By such a mutual regard for each other, you will contribute to each other’s comfort while you live, and I may venture to assure you that you will find no reason to repent of it, when separated by the stroke of death.

And, as this separating stroke is certainly approaching, I advise you to make it familiar to your minds ; think much of it ; and often remind each other how *unavoidable* it is, and how *near* it may possibly be. Assist one another in making preparation for it. Give up each other to God, in your daily addresses at the throne of grace. And be both of you faithful and diligent in the work of self-examination respecting your own preparation for death. Thus having familiarized, I may say, in some measure, anticipated this fatal stroke, you will be the less surprized when you meet

1 Pet. iii. 1.

Eph. v. 33.

with

with it. You may hope to bear it with christian fortitude, and to pass through the gloomy vale with greater serenity and calmness of mind.

8. We have seen that death makes no distinctions, that the young die as well as the old. I recommend this consideration to *parents* and *heads of families*, and beseech them to inculcate this truth on their children, and those who are under their care. Is any thing of equal consequence with *dying safe*? Can any part of parental duty, then, be equally necessary, with endeavouring that your offspring may be prepared for it? Can any of the ornaments or accomplishments of youth be of equal importance? And can any of you, parents, answer it to God, if you employ your own thoughts, or the thoughts of your children about these, to the neglect of that? I take it for granted you will readily allow that your conduct towards your children will be brought into the account at that great day, when "God shall bring to judgment every work, with every secret thing; whether it be good or whether it be evil." Will it at that day, appear to *your*, or to *their*

Eccl. xii. 14.

advantage, that you have taught them the employments, the amusements of life: but have neglected to teach them how they must be prepared for death? Will this be found, *then*, to be “training up your children in the way they should go? Will this be called “bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” If not, for your own sake, and for the sake of the fruit of your bodies, make it your chief care and business, to promote your childrens preparation for the hour of death.

In order to this, I advise you to instruct them in the nature and necessity of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Shew them the sinfulness of sin, and the ruin it has brought upon them, and all the human race. And inform them of the great love of God, displayed in the wonderful gift of his dear son to die for them; with the fulness, freeness, and suitableness of that salvation exhibited in the gospel, of which Jesus is the “author, to all them that obey him.” Endeavour to impress these things on their tender minds by the weightiest confide-

Ezek. xii. 14. Prov. xxii. 6. Eph. vi. 4. Acts xx. 21.
Heb. v. 9.

rations

rations you can think of. Let your holy conversation give a sanction to your instructions, while you water them, if I may so speak, with your daily prayers, in your closet and family devotions.

9. The subjects we have been endeavouring to illustrate and enforce, will furnish a word of admonition and advice to the *youths* in this assembly. You, my young friends, see the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of life, and the dreadful condition of those who die unpardoned and unrenowned; with the inexpressible happiness of those that *die in the Lord*, whether aged or young. Death may seize you in your younger years, as it has done many round about you. Here, give me leave to enquire whether it is *wisdom* or *folly* to neglect the great concern of preparing for death? I appeal to your own consciences. I appeal to all mankind. I appeal to the blessed inhabitants of heaven. Yea, if there be any degree of honesty in those black flaming regions, I should not scruple to appeal to the tormented spirits in hell; but especially, I appeal to the general tenor of the bible, whether such neglect be a proof of wisdom, or of the most egregious folly. I am persuaded you will allow, that all intelligent beings in the

whole creation of God would unite in confessing that if any thing among mortals deserve the name, it is folly in the extreme to live one day contentedly, unprepared to die. Because "we know not what a day may bring forth." Nor can the thoughtless sinner be sure that he shall not be tormented in hell to-morrow. Why then, O why will you pursue that path *now*, on account of which you will be accounted *fools* by all in heaven, earth, and hell, and self-condemned as fools in your own consciences, under inexpressible agonies and torments world without end? Let me advise you no longer to "follow lying vanities, and forsake your own mercies." Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." Leave the gaudy trifles, by which so many are allured to the chambers of death; leave these to such as are calling "evil good, and good evil," and pursue the treasures that can never be exhausted, and the ornaments that will adorn you before the throne of God, ten thousand ages hence.

Are any of my young auditors settling in life? beware of an anxious fondness for a portion in this world. Form all your schemes

Jonah, ii. 8.

Isai. lv. 6.

Isai. v. 23.

with

with an eye to the service and glory of God; in an humble submission to his will, and a resignation to the disposals of his providence. The event which has called this large assembly together, has written before our eyes in legible characters, the uncertainty of all earthly comforts; and teacheth us in the plainest manner how soon the best concerted human plans may be dashed to pieces. Be ye therefore wise to choose that "good part which shall never be taken away from you." I would hope that through the blessing of God, this advice will take place in your minds. but if any of you still slight it, I leave you to answer it to God, and only suggest the tremendous admonition of the wisest of men. "Rejoice, O young man in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

10. Let my last remark and advice be to the relations of the deceased. My honoured friends, you are most intimately concerned in

Luke x. 34.

Eccl. xi. 9.

the

the stroke of providence we are now endeavouring to improve. You will, I trust, attend, with peculiar care to the instructive lessons deducible from it. Suffer a word of exhortation; and may the "God of the spirits of all flesh," bless it to your minds!

Praise the name of God for the evidence you have that your dear relative is "taken from the evil to come," to be "for ever with the Lord." Bless "the God of all grace" for the honour conferred on her, and for the unutterable comfort and satisfaction that the reflection must yield to you. But I beseech you to remember that while I am exhorting and advising others, these advices and exhortations concern you in a *special manner*. I earnestly entreat you, by all that is sacred, solemn, and tremendous, as you hope to meet her at the right hand of her Lord and Saviour at the last day, with pleasure to yourselves, that you closely and immediately examine your preparation for that awful period. And if, by what I have said, and what the scripture contains on this subject, any of you find yourselves not in that state you would wish to be in when death meets you, rest in your present

present condition no longer : but, this evening, begin to reflect on the ruin brought upon you by sin. Confess your iniquities at the throne of grace ; and fly by faith, to the ever-blessed Saviour, that you may be washed in his blood, and quickened and purified by his spirit ; that you may at last, with your departed relation, and all who have died in “ the faith of the son of God,” appear before the throne, “ without spot, and blameless.” I have the pleasing hope that some of you can view this solemn period with pleasure. O, may you all, through grace, be wise in time, and happy eternally !

With respect to you, my *aged* friends, the *parents* of the deceased, I congratulate you, on the honour our blessed Redeemer has conferred upon you, in advancing one of your offspring to the regions of glory. I join with you in praising God for so great a favour. I rejoice in hope that you will both be found ready to follow her, whenever the Lord shall be pleased to call you. In the course of nature this call cannot be very far distant. I exhort you to be ambitious that you may bring “ forth much fruit in your age ;” and lay up much treasure in heaven.”

Especially,

Eſpecially, my dear brother in the miniſtry, this ſtroke affects you ; and I truſt the Lord will vouchſafe you *ſpecial* ſupports under the weight of it. I cordially unite with your many ſympathizing friends in “ weeping with you that now weep,” and we ſhare with you in the joy that ariſes from the ſweet reflection, that the partner of your life is tranſlated from your boſom, to the boſom of your everliving Saviour. I earneſtly pray that this viſitation may quicken your zeal in the work of the Lord ! O, my brother, ſee the vanity of *all earthly bliſs*, written at large, in the duſt of your dear wife, and with redoubled vigor, conſecrate your all to your Saviour ; and with renewed alacrity, run the race that is ſet before you. A crown awaits you, a crown that “ fadeth not away.” Let every days labours in the work of the Lord, be adding to its luſtre. And when that bleſſed period commences that you ſhall meet your Saviour on a throne of glory, and your late amiable partner among thoſe at his right hand, may you then, be found in the happy number of thoſe who have “ turned many to righteouſneſs, and ſhine as the ſtars for ever and ever.”

Rom. xiii. 15.

I have

I have the honour and pleasure to see several of my brethren in the ministry now before me. Allow me, brethren, to digress so far as to drop one word to you. *Our* time is flying swift away. *Death* is near. *Sinners* are perishing on every side. *Our* account is very awful; but if we be faithful and diligent, our "reward will be great in heaven." Rouse ye, brethren, rouse ye, in the name of God! think what can be done for Christ, that poor sinners may, through his grace, be "plucked as brands from the burning!" If we have any bowels of compassion, let us leave no methods untried to bring them to the knowledge of themselves and their Saviour; that they be happy in life and death; and may be our "crown of rejoicing in the day of Jesus Christ." If we are *really* the faithful ministers of Christ, we are happy in him, and devoted to him. And if so, the stroke of death will be no surprize to us; but an abundant entrance will be administered to us into his everlasting kingdom". Let us be diligent and "faithful unto death, and we shall certainly receive a crown of life."

To conclude; we must all soon "appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The

words of the prophet may be applied by us all, with reference to the stroke of death. "Thus will I do unto thee; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God." In the prospect of this solemn day I dismiss you; not expecting to see many of you again, before it commence. Attentive to it, or regardless of it, we must all soon meet the great eternal judge. All the dead, small and great shall soon stand before God; and the books will be opened; and another book will be opened, even the book of life, and the dead will be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works. The advice I give you, brethren, I hope, through divine grace, to take, myself. And with this engagement, I most cordially bid you farewell. To the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Amos iv. 12



T H E E N D.